

Attorney Docket No. 11538US01

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

The present invention that provides a network topology for an ATM network. The topology includes a source network element, at least one intermediate  
5 network element, and a distributed virtual path connecting the source network element and the intermediate network elements. The distributed virtual path includes a virtual circuit that originates from the source network element and a  
10 virtual circuit that originates from at least one of the intermediate network elements. The distributed virtual path originates from the source network element and may terminate on a destination network element or on the source network element (thereby  
15 forming a ring). The network elements may be, for example, computers, satellites or other communications devices.